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AUTHOR Farnbach, Beth E.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to provide information about the process of grant writing for law and civic education project directors who have little or no experience with proposals. The article attempts to clarify the usual components of grant proposals and provides some grant writing strategies. The paper is not intended to provide a complete picture of the grantsmanship process. The focus is rather on assisting new grant writers as they begin the process of gaining funding. (LH)

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THE BASICS OF GRANT WRITING FOR LAW AND CIVIC EDUCATION PROJECT DIRECTORS

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CENTER FOR CIVIC EDUCATION
5146 DOUGLAS FIR ROAD
CALABASAS, CA 91302
(818) 591-9321 ♦ FAX (818) 591-9330

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The purpose of this paper is to provide basic information about the process of grant writing for law and civic education project directors who have little or no experience with proposals. I have attempted to clarify the usual components of a grant proposal and to share some strategies.

This paper is not intended to provide a complete picture of the grantsmanship process, nor do I attempt to duplicate what can be learned from The Grantsmanship Center, public libraries, and the research and development office of most sponsoring agencies and universities. My hope is to assist new grant writers successfully to begin the process of gaining funding for the many fine programs available for the benefit of young people.

The original version of this technical assistance paper was prepared for the April 1993, "State Law-Related Education Program Directors Conference" held in Philadelphia. The conference was sponsored by the Center for Research and Development in Law-Related Education (CRADLE), Wake Forest University School of Law.

Beth E. Farnbach
Director of Educational Services
August 1995

Center for Civic Education
5146 Douglas Fir Road • Calabasas, CA 91302 • (818) 591-9321

I. THE PARTS OF A PROPOSAL

A. Introduction/Summary/Abstract

- This section provides an opportunity to give a clear, concise, and well-organized overview of the proposal, using key words that the funding source has indicated. This is usually where your project's first impression is made and it should represent you in the best possible light. In brief form, according to the directions, tell who you are, what the needs you wish to address are, what you plan to do, how you will know when you have met your goals, and exactly what you want from the funding source.

- Federal and state proposal forms usually have a space for the abstract on the proposal cover sheet. Letters to foundations and corporations should begin with a summary addressing these points.

B. Statement of Needs

- This section is also called "Stating the Problem." Clearly and concisely state the needs that proposal is designed to address. Refer to statistics, research, demographics, national or state reports and studies showing that a problem exists, and documentation that the solution you propose may be effective. Briefly summarize research indicating promising practices in ameliorating the problem you describe.

- Carefully assess the needs you can reasonably address with your experience, your staff, and the funding you seek. Be careful not to delineate long term societal ills or vague concerns that you can not possibly have an impact on in a year or two, the duration of most grants.

C. Objectives of the Proposal

- The objectives should describe the outcome if the agency agrees to fund your proposal. Ideally the objectives will be specific and measurable. Objectives do not tell what you will do; they tell what will be the result of your funded activity.

- Explain specifically how these objectives meet the needs identified in the "Statement of Needs" section above.

D. Methods/Activities to Meet the Objectives, also known as The Plan of Action

- Specifically outline what you will do to meet each objective. Be sure to include who will carry out each activity, who will oversee the entire project, and the timeframe for carrying out the project.

- Incorporate time lines and organizational charts if they are clear and useful.

- Estimate the number of people who will undertake each activity, and specify how they will be recruited. If you plan to seek out members of under-represented geographic areas or ethnic groups, specify how you plan to do so.

- Include in your plan such vital components as hiring staff, if required; meeting with advisory boards; preparing reports and evaluations; securing community involvement; and involving families.

- If you plan to produce a product, such as lesson plans, describe the approximate number of pages, the format, and the method of production, and means of distribution.

E. Evaluation

- This is a description of your plan to appraise whether you have met the objectives outlined in your proposal. You and the agency will want to determine how well you have carried out the funded activities, and if those activities have, in fact, met the needs you described.

- Another important way you can use evaluation is to gather information necessary to plan programs effectively and make improvements in your project during the time of the funded activity.

- Be sure that the agency knows whether you plan to use subjective or objective evaluations and exactly what you hope to measure.

- Project directors may wish to consider requesting funds to hire an evaluation specialist to design effective evaluation tools for the project.

- Be specific about the type of evaluation you will provide at the end of the grant period.

F. Capacity of the Project to Fulfill the Objectives/Qualifications of the Staff to Direct and Oversee the Activities Proposed

- Potential funders want to know why you and your agency should be entrusted with this money. Be sure that you give them every good reason to trust that you can carry out the activities, fulfill the objectives, and responsibly oversee the budget.

- The information you provide may include: the location and responsibilities of your agency; other supporters or cosponsors for your program; how and when the project was started, and what your record of success has been thus far. If the project is part of a supporting institution, such as a university or bar association, mention the institutional commitment and services, such as accounting or office space.

- A brief summary of special qualifications of project director and other key personnel is helpful here. Experience related to the specific objectives and activities in the proposal should be outlined to document the likelihood of success in carrying out the proposed activities projected outcome.

- An additional point of great interest to most agencies is the plan to carry on the project after funding has ended. How will you institutionalize the services developed in the grant? Is there a reasonable expectation that the project will continue in the future without depending upon this particular funding source?

G. Budget

- Write a budget narrative where possible, assuring the potential funding source that your budget is cost effective, reasonable, consistent with actual costs of personnel and services, and that it will enable you to carry out the activities described in your proposal.

- Any time you can show that matching, in-kind, or other funding sources are helping to pay for a project, do so. For example, if you are asking for funding for a teachers' conference, you might point out the amount incurred by school districts by providing substitute fees, the hours provided by volunteer law enforcement officers, or the duplicating provided by a law firm.

- In general, agencies give careful directions about what they will and will not fund and the form they want you to use in developing the budget.

- Make sure that everything you ask for in the budget is justified in the objectives and activities portion of your proposal.

II. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE PROPOSALS

- *Read directions.* Follow the directions precisely. Gather all the information you need, then organize the information exactly as you are instructed in the request for proposals.

- *Be attentive to any information concerning how the proposal will be read and scored.* Often a point system is provided. Some questions may be worth 25 points and some 5 points.

- Many experts highly recommend that grant writers find a knowledgeable person to read and score a draft before the final proposal is written. If someone other than the project director is writing the proposal, the project director must make time to read all drafts and carefully examine the final product. No one else knows as much about the project as the director, not even a professional grant writer.

- *Review your proposal to remove abbreviations, professional jargon, and all assumptions that the reader works in your office and knows all about your project.* Examples of this might include references to "the department," "OPI," and "LRE."

- *Take care with appearances.* This is a professional document that speaks for you, your organization and all those who need your services. Good quality printers, pagination, correct spelling, and complete sentences are absolute requirements.

III. ATTACHMENTS

- Follow directions as to whether attachments are acceptable, required, or not wanted. Federal and state grants often have numerous forms, called assurances and certifications, that must be attached. Frequently these attachments are filled out by someone outside your office. Check the process as early as possible at your university, state office of education, school district, or other administrative agency.

- If attachments are to be used, consider the following:

    1. List of (influential and representative) board members
    2. Edited resumes of project director and other *key* staff and consultants
    3. Map of your state, showing target areas
    4. Personally written letters from representative people who know your programs, e.g., judges, administrators, teachers, students, police. Ask them to use specific language about how you have helped in the past and how important this project is to the children in your target area

5. Agendas, newsletters, and participant lists that are carefully selected to document your past successes, and the credibility of your project
6. Letter from the key administrator of your agency assuring funders that your project is important, has the agency's full support, and needs funding *assistance* (not complete funding).
7. Brief summary of research that substantiates your claim that this proposed activity will have benefits to young people.

IV. BEFORE AND AFTER: THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Grant writing is only a small part of the fund raising process. It probably is the least time-consuming aspect of the ongoing business of keeping a law and civic education project financially solvent while developing new programs. Some vital functions of the project director before and after the actual writing of the proposal follow:

BEFORE

- Contact agencies and organizations to learn their funding interests and your eligibility. Sometimes this can be handled by mail, but most often the project director must go in person to the agency.

- Solicit program ideas from staff, constituents, board members, teachers, students. Talk to people from geographically and ethnically diverse areas of your state and listen carefully to what they suggest.

- Some agencies, such as Humanities Councils, require a preliminary proposal to which their staff will react and direct comments. Other organizations may request a concept paper or position paper, generally a three-to-five page proposal summary. Proposals are subsequently "invited" by the agency or organization, often for a specific amount of money. These are usually funded if the grant writer follows the directions provided. The concept paper should include all the components of the proposal without the detail.

- Serve on committees and task forces that write statewide goals and regulations that might have an effect on schools, curriculum, state guidelines, state bar goals, and funding for your organization.

- Invite key people from agencies and organizations to attend your conferences, to give you advice in planning programs, to help contact their colleagues and recommend others who can ofter you help. Insofar as possible, involve these key people with youth projects and activities so they understand what you do.

- Make sure your board or advisory board members are part of the process. They can contact people, visit officials with you, and direct you to funding sources.

- Be sure that public policy makers on the local, state, and national level know your goals and your good work. Invite them to your events.

AFTER

- Send thank you letters to anyone who helped you. Keep them informed about the progress of the project and use every opportunity to involve them in your activities, especially with children.

- Be sure to follow all the reporting requirements and file complete information in a timely manner.

- Publish lists of your funders and recognize your sources of funding on every program, invitation, agenda, lesson plan collection, newsletter, and anything else you produce. People want to see their agency appreciated and their own assistance recognized. This also helps you get new agencies and organizations interested; no one wants to be the sole source of support, responsible for your very existence. Thus, if the law school sees that the bar association helps, and the juvenile probation officers and police chiefs know that the other two think you are important, and the trial lawyers decide that they shouldn't be left out... You have the idea.

- Keep in touch with decision makers, agencies, and organizations that have funded you in the past, even if they have said they only give "seed money" for a limited time. You may find that they will entertain the idea of funding a different one of your great ideas with "seed money," or that a new category of interest may open for funding opportunities. Some ways to do this include sending your newsletter to the agency head; preparing a one or two page *status report* of your project, emphasizing the importance of that agency's help in building your successful programs; and continuing to visit from time to time asking about that agency's current interests.

- Also keep decision makers, agencies, and organizations that *have not* funded you informed of your progress. Persistence while building a track record, can surely provide rewards.

- Most law and civic education project directors and other grant writers have had both successes and rejections. It is helpful to learn from both. Do not hesitate to ask why you were not funded by an organization, and how you might improve

your chances the next time. ***Read*** reviewers' scores and comments, if they are available, and keep them next to your word processor as you prepare your next proposal.

- The director of a very successful law-related education project once said to me that she works on fund-raising every day. Although I heard her say this many years ago, I think of her advice often and believe that persistence along with first rate, substantive programs, will lead to success in grant awards.